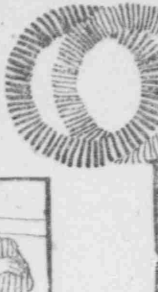


BELOW THE DEAD LINE

BY SCOTT CAMPBELL



NOTE

When Inspector Byrnes commanded the New York police force he found it necessary to issue an order calling for the instant arrest of every crook found day or night in that part of the metropolis lying south of Fulton street. This stringent order quickly gained for the district the title "below the dead-line," at least in police circles. As the lower part of the city contains Wall and Broad streets and Maiden lane, where the great diamond houses are located, various efforts were made by the "under world" to evade the order. For several years a number of crooks, headed by an unknown but extremely clever criminal, succeeded in operating in the district despite the police, and it is to chronicle their doings and their ultimate capture that Mr. Scott Campbell has written this interesting series of stories.

THE CASE OF THE TAN GLOVE

"No, no, Jimmie, you can't keep a good man down," smiled Mr. Felix Boyd. "It's utterly impossible. You may get him down, and by fixing a cast-iron grin upon him you may, perhaps, keep him down for a time. But the instant you lose your hold, the word for it, Jimmie, he'll bob up—surely from under your arm, or beneath your legs, or from some utterly unexpected quarter, and have at you again. No, no, Jimmie, you can't keep a good man down."

The central office man smiled complacently over his Blue Points, in the consumption of which he was too diligently absorbed to reply, and Felix Boyd presently added, in rambling mood:

"It is with the Big Finger, Jimmie. We've had him down half-a-score of times in the past year, or as good as down; and in each and every case, just before its culmination, just before our final blow was dealt, we've had wadded our very lives against his escape."

"So we would, Felix," admitted Coleman, with a dubious nod.

"Yet in each and every case, Jimmie, he slipped like an eel through our fingers," continued Boyd. "Owing to no fault of ours, mind you, no lack of precaution or shrewdness on our part, but merely because Satan, so it seems to me, often derives infinite satisfaction from serving his own at such critical moments."

"Very likely," laughed Coleman. "That's surely a philosophical way of looking at it."

"I think so, Jimmie," nodded Boyd. "He certainly is a good man, this Big Finger, or he never could have baited and baffled you as he has done. Yes, he's a good man—in his infernal bad line!"

"And, as I said in the beginning, Jimmie, you can't keep a good man down," added Boyd, a bit grimly. "Take my word for it, the cover will slip again before we fairly know it, and, like an ugly jack-in-the-box, the Big Finger will again bob up, to give us renewed anxiety and additional trouble."

"Think so, Felix?"

"I do, indeed, Jimmie," nodded Boyd. "Idleness is an ally to that evil genius as beneficence is to a hog. We certainly shall hear from him again."

"Yet a month is but little in the life of a man."

"That's true enough, Felix. Yet we succeeded in landing every man of his gang—save him alone."

"Humph! He soon will organize another."

"Do you believe it?"

"It's as sure as death and taxes, Jimmie. A month, did you say? Yes, so it is. Two weeks in Bellevue, nursing a brace of broken ribs; and two weeks recuperating in the Adlon-dacks. I marvel that the Big Finger did not seize the opportunity presented by my absence, to develop and execute one of his infernally crafty and—"

"Hello! break off for a moment, Jimmie! I've an idea that yonder men are talking of me."

And Felix Boyd bent a furtive glance in the direction of two young men, who were seated at lunch in the main room of the cafe.

The scene was a popular downtown restaurant. In a few blocks of the busy section of New York included below the dead-line, the territory specially assigned to Detective Coleman of the central office, and the field of most of Felix Boyd's remarkable exploits.

It was, as Coleman had said, just a month since that great police raid deigned and directed by Boyd, which had resulted in the wholesale capture of the gang of accomplished crooks dominated by the notorious Big Finger, whose criminal operations below the dead-line long had been a menace to every great financial institution thereabouts.

As previously related, the escape of this obscure master criminal had been entirely accidental, a mishap which had cost Felix Boyd not only his chief prisoner, but also two broken ribs and other less serious injuries.

The couple referred to by Boyd, as above noted, appeared to be discussing some object, which one of them had produced from a small wad of white cotton, taken from his top pocket, and which had led his companion to glance occasionally in Boyd's direction. Returning it after a brief examination, he remarked, with a smile:

"Looks all right, Gerry. In my opinion, the diamond is a valuable one."

Gerry replaced the glittering gem in the wad of cotton, then jammed it back into his pocket.

Glad to hear you say so, Delmore," he rejoined.

"As a matter of fact, however, my opinion is valueless, for I am not a judge of precious stones," added Delmore, who was a reputable Wall Street broker of the youngest set. "But there's a very easy way of getting at the truth."

"How so?"

"Submit the stone to Mr. Felix Boyd. He very quickly will pass upon it for you, and his judgment is infallible."

"Mr. Felix Boyd?"

"Don't you know him?"

"I can't say that I do."

Delmore's brow arched perceptibly. "Humph! Is that so?" he murmured surprisedly. "I thought everybody knew Felix Boyd."

"I have been abroad for three years," remarked Gerry, with apologetic humility. "What about this man—Mr. Felix Boyd?"

Delmore dipped his fingers into the cut-glass bowl the waiter and placed before him, then deliberately dried them with his napkin.

"Well, Gerry," he presently rejoined, "one might say a good deal about Felix Boyd, and then leave much unsaid. There are few, indeed, who could tell it all, for Boyd, and his secret relations with some of the financial kings of Wall Street, are mysteries yet to be unveiled. If you have

"I'm going up to headquarters for a spell," replied Coleman. "I have a report to turn in, and two letters to write."

"Shall I see you later?"

"I'll drop into your office about 5."

"So long, then."

The central office man bowed and departed.

Boyd lingered for several moments in the restaurant doorway, with his brows knit in thought. He had just seen, a most remarkable instance of a genuine diamond, and no man was quicker to discern the alarming possibilities of such counterfeits.

Boyd had on his list of clients several wealthy diamond importers and brokers of Maiden Lane, as well as two large retail jewelry houses; and of them, too, he was thinking, and of the warning with which he might serve them.

Thus musing events at times cast their shadows before. For as Boyd presently turned to depart, he suddenly observed this office boy, Terence Gowan, bolting across the street toward him.

"Gosh! I'm just in the nick of time," groaned Terry, flushed and well-nigh breathless. "You're wanted at once, Mr. Boyd."

Boyd's clean-cut, attractive face flashed a smile.

"Gerry said so," he admitted. "I'll be right back."

Gerry started slightly, then laughed. "Well, really, Mr. Boyd," he exclaimed, "that's curious. I thought I was in a fix about that too."

"At precisely that time, Mr. Boyd," smiled Gerry. "I was once serving an antique American scholar, when I wished to add to my collection. I observed you only by chance."

"Well, well, you must have an excellent memory, Mr. Boyd, to have recalled the date so readily."

"Remembering good, yes. What's the news, Delmore?"

And Felix Boyd bowed and smiled to the one, turned conventionally to the other, and then reappeared to his former indifference much as if the episode had ended.

"Nothing new, Boyd," replied Delmore. "By the way, Gerry, let's see that stone. Well, ask Mr. Boyd's opinion of it."

"Delighted, I am sure," cried Gerry, hastening to produce the wad of cotton.

"Have a look at this, Mr. Boyd, will you? You are said to be a judge of such things, and we'd like to know what you make of it. I call it a diamond, and a very good one."

Felix Boyd accepted the proffered gem and studied it for several moments in the palm of his hand. Presently he looked up and said:

"Where did you get this stone, Mr. Gerry?"

Gerry colored deeply, then covered his momentary embarrassment with a laugh.

"Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Boyd, I found an acquaintance at last night, and accepted that stone as collateral."

"He ask a bit hard up, eh?" smiled Boyd, with a sharper glint in his lifted eyes.

"So it appeared."

"A friend of yours?"

"Well—not exactly," faltered Gerry. "Merely an acquaintance."

"Been long acquainted with him?"

Gerry laughed again, rather half heartily.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Boyd, I never saw him until last evening."

"I ran across him while doing the town in a rather rakish fashion, and we traveled a bit in company. Incidentally he complained of being temporarily strangled, and I made him the loan, mentioned."

"Naturally you learned his name?"

"The name he gave me, in return for my card, was Peterson. Yet I cannot say it was reliable, nor where he now may be found."

"That is very much to be regretted," said Boyd, with curious intonation.

"Why so, sir? Is there any doubt about the stone?"

Boyd rolled the glittering bauble across the damask table toward his questioner.

"The stone is a production of art, Mr. Gerry, not of nature," said he, with quiet significance. "It is one of the best artificial diamonds I ever saw."

"Artificial?"

"Precisely. Yet it is so good that it might deceive even a practiced eye. As I remarked, Mr. Gerry, it is much to be regretted that you cannot locate your friend of last evening. Should you again encounter him, I would suggest that you have him detained by the police."

"I'll do that, at least!" exclaimed Gerry, quite red and beated. "Come, Delmore, I feel the need of a stimulant. Will you join us, Mr. Boyd?"

"I think not now, thank you," said Boyd, smiling. "Some other time, if agreeable to you."

"Chained at any time, I assure you."

Boyd gazed after the two men as they left the room. Only his eyes betrayed his glances of interest. They had taken on a gleam like that reflected from a polished blade in the moonlight. Presently he drew out a leather notebook, and with a pencil jotted down the name of Mr. Talbot Gerry.

"What do you make of that, Felix?" inquired Coleman earnestly.

Boyd shook his head significantly.

"Is another of those paste diamonds, Jimmie, of which I told you?" he replied. "This is the second I have seen, yet I plainly could have learned no more than before concerning the maker. He must be found—located—annihilated! His art is dangerous. His skill is a menace. Such imitations threaten the financial safety of every jewelry dealer in the country. If not in the world, I again must warn my clients in that line of the existence of these remarkable counterfeits. Are you through, Jimmie? Come, then. I'll attend to this very day."

Coleman had merely nodded in response to the question, and the two men left the restaurant in company. As they emerged to the street, they were met at that hour with hurrying people, Boyd briefly paused and asked:

"Where now, Jimmie?"

"Well, Gerry," he presently rejoined, "one might say a good deal about Felix Boyd, and then leave much unsaid. There are few, indeed, who could tell it all, for Boyd, and his secret relations with some of the financial kings of Wall Street, are mysteries yet to be unveiled. If you have

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much wonder that your clerk did not detect the substituted imitations, they are extraordinarily good. By the way, Mr. Gibson, are there any previous circumstances bearing upon the prospective sale which led you to show this tray of rings to the woman who, I understand, has stolen some of them?"

"You may state any facts to this gentleman, Gibson," remarked Mr. Dabney.

"The clerk hastened to reply. 'I never saw the woman before today,' said he. 'About a week ago, however, a young man called and examined these rings, saying that he intended to buy one. He did not make a selection that day, but said he would call again in the course of a week and do so.'"

"Well?"

"He called this morning, sir, about 12 o'clock, and I again showed him the rings. Finally, he selected one, asking me to remember it, and said that he wished his wife to call and see it before he made the purchase. He said that she would call about 2 o'clock today, and I gave him one of my cards."

"Go on, Mr. Gibson."

"Just before 2 o'clock a young lady approached the counter here and presented the same card, requesting me to

show her the rings at which her husband had been looking. Naturally, sir, I had no suspicion, and readily complied. She examined the tray of rings, and we discussed them together, possibly occupying a quarter hour; yet not for a moment did I lose sight of the tray, or of her. She finally decided that her husband had made a desirable selection, and said she would at once send him a note, advising him to call and get the ring on his way home to-day, lest it should be sold to another. I provided her with paper and pencil, and she wrote the note, and immediately departed. Alas, sir, we since have discovered—"

"One moment, Mr. Gibson," Boyd interposed, now that he had got most of the man's story. "The method adopted by the swindlers is very obvious. The young man first called to study the tray of rings, that counterfeits might be made with which to deceive you. His visit this morning was calculated only to pave the way for his wife, thus tending in a measure to relax your vigilance. She evidently is a woman of superior nerve and exceeding dexterity. Under your very eyes she must have palmed the genuine rings, and disposed of them on her person, substituting only the counterfeits."

"It appears so," groaned Gibson, wringing his hands. "I could not have believed it possible, however."

"Kindly answer a few questions for me, Mr. Gibson. First describe the young man."

"He appeared to be about twenty-five, of medium height and build. He was rather boyish looking, as I recall him, wearing neither beard nor mustache. I should say that his complexion was light, his eyes blue, and his voice somewhat effeminate."

"How about the woman, Mr. Gibson?"

"She, too, was young, sir, and very pretty. She was fashionably dressed, and I naturally supposed her to be a young lady of wealth. She was rather above medium size, I should say, with fascinating eyes and a most alluring smile. I think of no special features by which she could be identified, nor any."

"One moment, please. How long since she departed?"

"Possibly half an hour."

"Were there any names mentioned?"

"None, sir."

"Perhaps you supposed the two parties to be a recently married couple?"

"That was precisely my impression, sir."

"Quite in order, I'm sure," nodded Boyd. "Really, Mr. Dabney, the case seems to present no very encouraging features."

"None at all that I can see," was the dubious rejoinder. "The swindlers certainly have gotten well away with the goods."

"If you had but a single idea to offer me—"

"Oh, stay! that glove!" cried Mr. Dabney abruptly. "Possibly that will suggest something to Mr. Boyd."

"Ah, what is this?" cried Boyd, with a second warning glance at the impulsive speaker.

Gibson had produced from behind the counter a fashionable tan glove, lady's size, slightly worn and soiled. As he laid it upon the show case in front of Boyd, he quickly rejoined:

"She was dropped by the woman, sir, while she was writing the note mentioned. I did not discover it until she had gone, then saw it lying near the lacquer table yonder."

"You are sure that it was hers?" inquired Boyd.

"Absolutely. She had both gloves in her hand while examining the tray of rings."

"Ah, very likely," growled Boyd pointedly. "Possibly some of the purchased rings found their way into the other glove. A pity, too, it had not been this one. It bears no mark by which to track her. Medium size, however, and of French make. You say she sat at reader table while writing the note?"

And Boyd glanced again at a small, highly polished table, which stood in the aisle, with one of the counter chairs still beside it.

"Yes, sir," replied Gibson. "She occupied that chair. I provided her with a single sheet of paper which I happened to have here, and loaned her my pencil. She said she did not require any envelope, as she would send the note to her husband's office by her footman."

Boyd did not appear to have heard the last. Several of the store clerks had gathered in a group near by, and those standing nearest to him saw, or thought they saw, one swift, intensified gleam, as sharp as an electric flash, leap up from the depths of his frowning, gray eyes.

It was gone in an instant, however, and Boyd then dropped into the chair the thief had occupied, and proceeded to make a closer inspection of her tan glove—the one and only tangible clue to the mysterious pair of swindlers.

"Footman, eh?" he presently growled, plainly indicating that he had heard, despite appearances. "She came in a carriage, then?"

"So I infer," replied Gibson.

"You did not see the vehicle?"

"I did not, sir. Wishing to replace the tray of rings in the vault as soon as possible, I did not accompany her to the door."

There was a brief period of silence, the more strained because of the obvious mental absorption of the man in the chair. Felix Boyd sat tipping the small, polished table to and fro, with his brows knit, his lips drawn and his gaze constantly fixed upon the dainty bit of furniture. Through one of the broad plate-glass windows near by the glare of light fell upon its polished surface, and accentuated with its reflection Boyd's strangely set and forceful face.

Presently he started abruptly and glanced at his watch, finding it to be nearly half-past two.

"Suppose you bring those twelve bogus rings into your private office, Mr. Dabney," said he carelessly, as he arose. "An examination under a lens may reveal something."

"Possibly," admitted Dabney; yet for his life he could not have told what advantage was thus to be derived.

"You may put them in a small box for me, Mr. Gibson."

"I will take along this tan glove, also," remarked Boyd, sauntering away in advance.

As he approached the end of one of the counters, however, at which Terry Gowan was staring idly into a show-case, Boyd's indifference suddenly took wings. His hand closed upon the lad's arm with a grip that betrayed his suppressed energy, and he bowed to whisper rapidly:

"Find the store telephone, Terry! Get Coleman at the central office. Have him meet me at the Hotel Tripoli at 3 o'clock! Three sharp, mind you! Hotel Tripoli!"

"I'm wise, sir," the lad quickly nodded, and immediately slipped away.

As Boyd stepped aside for Dabney to precede him into the latter's private office, which was at the rear of the store, he took from the jeweler's hand the small pasteboard box containing the dozen bogus rings.

"I'll keep these for a spell, Mr. Dabney," said he, with curious indifference. "By the way, while I think of it, what is the price of the lacquer table out yonder, the one at which I was seated?"

"Forty dollars," cried Dabney, perplexed and irritated. "That's a strange question to ask at such a time as this. Is your interest in that infernal little table more pronounced than in the service you are employed to render me? If it is, Mr. Felix Boyd—"

"Ght! stow all that!" Boyd curtly interrupted. "I'll take the table at the price quoted. Set it aside for me without fail. I shall call here again before 6, Mr. Dabney, and then will report on this case."

But—

"There are no buts, sir, when I declare myself," growled Boyd, thrusting the glove and box of rings into his pocket. "It now is half-past 2. I'll have an important engagement. Expect me again within the interval mentioned. Meantime—not a word!"

Why—certainly not a word!—gasped Dabney, with an amazed stare.

For Mr. Felix Boyd already had departed.

"It's up to me, sir," nudged the bookman, quick to see that some serious emergency existed, and that each second was of value.

He drove through the noisy streets at a rate of speed that threatened not only his own vehicle, but many another as well, and caused more than one blue-coated patrolman to start involuntarily, and also tardily, as it to stop him.

Reclining upon the cushions within Mr. Felix Boyd was complacently smoking a cigar.

He threw it away when the carriage began to slow down, and again coasted his watch. It wanted eight minutes of three, as he sprang out upon the sidewalk in front of the hotel mentioned.

"Wait, cabbie," said he, glancing sharply up and down the street.

"Right, sir."

In no direction was there any sign of Jimmie Coleman, yet Boyd did not defer operations pending his arrival. With the cabbie gazing curiously after him, he quickly mounted the steps of the hotel, which was a tolerable brick edifice of six stories, and entered the open vestibule. There were numerous seats lounging about the inner office, and his entrance was not specially noticed.

Approaching the register, Boyd glanced rapidly at the names inscribed on the latest page. Presently he lighted upon one in a curious angular hand, which again brought that cold and relentless gleam to his searching eyes. The line across the page read:

"Mr. and Mrs. Philip Kelsey, City, 21."

The number was that of the suite occupied by the Kelseys.

Boyd did not summon a bell-boy. He entered the elevator, located the suite mentioned, and presently approached the door.

That the rooms were occupied at that moment was immediately obvious—the key had been left in the door, on the hall side.

Once more Boyd glanced at his watch. It wanted three minutes of three. Then he knocked gently upon the closed door of Suite 21.

A voice from within called promptly: "Come!"

Boyd drew himself up, smiled oddly for an instant, then gravely entered the room, closing the door behind him.

"I beg pardon, sir," said he, with a graceful bow. "I hope I do not intrude."

The remarks were addressed to a youthful, curly-haired chap, clad in a neat field suit, who had been surveying himself before a mantel mirror. He had turned when Boyd entered, however, and, upon seeing him, he gave vent to an involuntary ejaculation of surprise, more than half suppressed.

"I thought it was my wife who rapped," he said quickly. "Haven't you made a mistake, sir?"

"I think not, providing the hotel register is reliable," Boyd unctuously rejoined, bowing and smiling. "I am looking for Mrs. Philip Kelsey. I presume that you, sir, are Mr. Kelsey."

"Yes, that is my name," bowed the young man. "My wife is absent just now, however."

Kelsey appeared pale, strangely pale, and his fair features were tensely drawn; yet he steadily met Boyd's gaze with his dilated blue eyes, and his rather effeminate voice never faltered.

"When will your wife return, Mr. Kelsey?" inquired Boyd, quite affably.

"I cannot say, sir."

"No?"

"I have just come in myself. What is your business with me, please?"

"I would prefer to inform her, providing she returns in time for—"

"Surely, sir, it cannot consist of anything of which I should be kept in ignorance," interrupted Kelsey, a dark frown sweeping to his fair, attractive face.

Boyd laughed softly, and shook his head.

"Why, no, of course not," said he. "It consists of nothing very important. I am a messenger from Messrs. Dabney & Co., the jewelers, of Maiden Lane. Your wife called there this afternoon to look at the ring you contemplated buying. Unfortunately, Mrs. Kelsey's drooped one of her gloves, which was found after she departed, and I have been sent here to return it to her."

And Mr. Felix Boyd drew the tan glove from his pocket, and advanced to place it upon the table.

Kelsey had grown as white as the linen at his throat, yet his nerve did not appear to forsake him. He drew himself up, forcing a sickly smile to his drawn lips, and directed one furtive glance toward the closed door, between which and him Mr. Felix Boyd remained standing.

"This is very kind of you, yet you have been to needless trouble," said he, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "The glove is worth but little. You may have it, sir, and I will hand it to my wife."

"Ah, yes, thank you," drawled Felix Boyd.

Yet he did not depart.

Kelsey regarded him for a moment, as a cat watches a mouse.

"Is there anything more?" he abruptly demanded. "Why do you remain?"

"To see that your wife gets her glove," smiled Boyd.

"I tell you that I will hand it to her when she returns," cried Kelsey impatiently.

"I would prefer to wait until she returns if it's all the same to you."

"Absurd! She may be absent for some time."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Kelsey, I will wait," persisted Boyd. "My patience will not be severely tried, and I wish to see her."

(Continued on Third Page.)



BOYD WHIPPED OUT HIS REVOLVER AND FIRED THREE TIMES THROUGH THE DOOR.

changed like a flash, instantly taking on that flat, determined look which invariably characterized him when engaged by any professional emergency.

"By whom?" he curtly demanded, with eyes dilating.

"Dabney & Co., sir, Maiden Lane," replied Terry,